

Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program Report

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program, administered by the Library of Michigan, resulted in invaluable technology upgrades and educational programming in public libraries across Michigan. Nearly 300 libraries and countless residents benefited from this program specifically aimed at assisting the unemployed, underemployed and those simply considering a career change. Library patrons seeking employment resources via the Internet sharpened their computer skills and learned effective job searching techniques through this innovative, first of its kind partnership among State of Michigan agencies. Furthermore, enhancing the Internet connectivity of public-access computers in libraries throughout Michigan to provide quick access to online resources for the unemployed exemplifies the mission of the Library of Michigan to promote, advocate and consistently work to achieve the highest level of library service to the State of Michigan, its libraries and its residents.

Background

The Michigan Legislature appropriated \$4 million in federal Reed Act funds to the Library of Michigan. These funds are excess Federal Unemployment Insurance Trust Act (FUTA) reserve proceeds released to the states, generally during economic recessions, to help meet the needs of unemployed workers. The Library of Michigan maximized its resources to serve this population by combining the Reed Act funds with other federal, foundation and local funds, providing a bridge to a sustainable technology program that will ensure that ongoing library services will be made available to local communities. The Library of Michigan received a \$482,160 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation earmarked for broadband upgrades for public libraries, which, together with the Reed Act funds and the federal E-rate program for sustainability, provided a well-rounded solution for serving the unemployed via Michigan's public libraries.

Libraries applied for funding for broadband upgrades and for the non-discounted portion of their annual telecommunications and/or Internet service costs. Additionally, libraries were required to apply for federal E-rate discounts for ongoing sustainability of their broadband services or to provide a description of their plans to sustain services through other mechanisms. Funding priority was given to libraries in areas of high unemployment.

Some of the Reed Act funding was used to purchase LearnATest, an online database offered free to Michigan residents through the Michigan eLibrary (www.mel.org). LearnATest features test-preparation materials and interactive practice tests to help users improve their scores on a variety of academic, civil service, military, and professional licensing and certification exams. Michigan's library cooperatives also received Reed Act funding through the Library of Michigan to provide training programs and resources to help library staff members better serve unemployed workers.

Programs and Evaluations

In addition to meeting the needs of Michigan's unemployed and underemployed workers, the Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program represents the goals set out by the Library of Michigan in its Library Services & Technology Act Five-Year Plan for Michigan, October 2002 through September 2007. The Library of Michigan determined that library users statewide need public-access computers and training in their use; immediate online access to electronic materials; and awareness of the materials available free of charge from the library. The Reed Act funding helped capitalize on the investment already made in extensive resources and information systems for Michigan's libraries.

Thanks to the individual grants and the training through the cooperatives, 286 libraries determined their needs and implemented new services. For these libraries, the funding meant upgrading their Internet connectivity, even going from a 56K connection to a T1 line in at least a few cases; holding workshops and classes to teach users computer and job-application skills; providing one-on-one instruction; buying new computers or software; or marketing their services through resource lists, Web sites or signage.

The grant was implemented in two phases. The 45 libraries funded in the first round have completed their evaluations of the grant program, including a patron survey, a staff observation of patron computer use and a narrative summary of the library's actions and observed results. The remaining 241 libraries will complete their evaluations by June 30, 2005.

Reed Act/Gates Foundation Grant Program Success Stories

Albion Public Library

The Albion Public Library offers a wide range of resources to help the unemployed, from print career guides and company directories to staff members trained in assisting unemployed workers. Using the Reed Act funding, the library increased its broadband access to provide improved computing experiences for all its patrons. It's a popular resource: The library averages more than 500 users a month on its four Internet stations, and every day at least one patron works on a resume or searches for a job. To let users know about valuable job resources, the library displayed signage for LearnATest and the Michigan Career Portal, and it offered information on Michigan Works.

The grant allowed Albion to free up funding to buy more public-access computers and a resume software program. Beginning in fall 2004, patrons will have their pick of eight computers with Internet access and two dedicated word-processing computers.

"Many of our patrons do not have access to a computer at home so the library is offering a great service to the people in Albion with the support made possible by the Reed Act/Gates grant," Director Colleen Verge said. "Our patrons demonstrate the ability to access unemployment resources, perform job searches and apply for jobs online."

Blair Memorial Library

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation funding helped the Blair Memorial Library in Clawson maintain its broadband Internet access while adding much-needed word-processing software. This has become one of the library's most popular offerings, allowing patrons to type resumes and cover letters.

"It often seems that when hard times befall our nation and unemployment rates rise, our small community is hit harder than most," Director Elizabeth Kelman said. "This being the case, many of our residents come to us looking for help so they can get back on their feet."

The results of the library's survey reflect that need: "If I didn't have the library's computer resources," one patron responded, "I wouldn't be able to put my resume [online] or send my resume to employers."

The library launched a solid marketing campaign to make library users aware of services for unemployed workers. Bookmarks and fliers suggesting Web resources, and an article in the city newsletter, "Clawson Highlights," caught people's attention and drew many users in to explore the new services. "I feel it is ESSENTIAL that this resource is available to those who are not fortunate enough to own a computer," one patron wrote in the library's survey. "I can't afford one and this was a blessing to come here to apply for jobs."

Cadillac Wexford County Public Library

The Cadillac Wexford County Public Library set out to improve patron skills in a variety of ways as part of the Reed Act/Gates Foundation funding. Faster Internet access was just the beginning as the library offered additional occupational education classes. The improved connectivity enabled patrons to achieve their employment-related objectives in a shorter period of time, library staff member Lisa Marie Popp said.

Weekly classes covered composing resumes and cover letters in Microsoft Word, filing unemployment claims online, job hunting in cyberspace and submitting job applications online. Librarians also highlighted the vast employment resources contained in the Michigan eLibrary, along with offering one-on-one assistance to those with low computer literacy. Patrons without computers at home responded to the survey that they depended on the library for computer and Internet access. But the Cadillac Wexford County Public Library offered more than equipment by providing value-added services. One patron wrote, "The librarians are very helpful with filing unemployment and job searching."

Dickinson County Library

Located in the Upper Peninsula, the Dickinson County Library serves a population that has an unemployment rate that averages around 7 percent. The library used the Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant award to upgrade to a T1 Internet connection in 2003. Because of this increase in bandwidth, the library also added five public-access computers.

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To further serve the unemployed, the library held basic computer workshops. Several of the participants said they needed to learn these basic skills to obtain a job or enhance their existing one, Director Ray Arnett said. "One gentleman has used his new computer skills to communicate with other artists and hopes to begin selling/displaying his artwork over the Internet."

Flat Rock Public Library

The Flat Rock Public Library used its Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant to increase its Internet connection to a T1 line, which also allowed the library to function properly with the new automated system installed by its cooperative, The Library Network.

Using the grant to pay for the Internet enhancements meant the library had enough money to replace 5-year-old computer equipment. These improvements make the library, "a great tool to use for looking up the latest job listings and applying online," one patron responded in the library's survey.

For three months, a young father looking for a job rarely missed a day in front of the library's computers, Director Marney Cooley said. The day after he accepted a position, he made a special trip back to the library to thank the staff for making Internet access available.

Additionally, the library held a resume workshop that included information on online job searching, and it hosted a small business startup workshop sponsored by the Michigan Small Business & Technology Development Center.

Forsyth Township Public Library

The one-room, rural Forsyth Township Public Library upgraded from a dial-up Internet connection to 256K, and received a tremendous response from the community. "This was a monumental change," Director Kathy Holman said. "Previously, people often left when the Web site access was slow. Now, they told us they purposely came to the library because of the increased broadband speed. We had many people who were not regular library users come to the library specifically because of the increased broadband access."

To provide services for those seeking employment, the library staff taught beginning computer classes and compiled a packet of Michigan job and career information to place at each of the library's seven public-access computers. Patrons used career Web sites frequently, and many printed resumes. One user made a point to return to the library to let the staff know she was hired for a job she found using library resources.

Freeport District Library

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant brought the first high-speed Internet connection to the rural village of Freeport via the Freeport District Library. "We noticed that even when patrons had computers with Internet connections at home they came to use our computers for their unemployment files because their home connections were too slow," Director Joanne Hesselink said.

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To better serve patrons seeking work, library staff members familiarized themselves with the Michigan unemployment Web site, other employment sites and the LearnATest database. The library also purchased new books on careers and resumes. Articles in the library newsletter and local newspaper as well as reports at local meetings increased awareness of these services.

Hamtramck Public Library

The Hamtramck Public Library used Reed Act/Gates Foundation funding to create two computer areas, one with new computers that boast Internet access, and another with the library's older computers, which are used for word processing. This word-processing area cut down on wait times for patrons wanting to create a resume rather than use the Internet.

To assist unemployed workers, the library created and distributed a list of search engines helpful for job searching. "We also took time to assist patrons who did not know how to use a computer," computer technician Konrad Maziarz said. "We showed these patrons how to set up an e-mail account, use the Internet and what search engines to use." Library staff members also helped users set up Michigan Works accounts and create resumes.

"Using the library's resources I was actually able to find a better job than the one I had, and it actually paid more, too," one patron responded in the library's survey.

Hazel Park Memorial Library

Increasing the speed of its Internet connection to a T1 line allowed the Hazel Park Memorial Library to add two computers, with one dedicated for word processing. "This computer gets the heaviest use by adults creating resumes/cover letters," Director Catherine Rudelich said.

For one patron responding to the library's survey, these added services made the difference: "I found it extremely helpful to use the word processor for my resume. I found a job through leads on the Internet at the library."

Holly Township Library

The Holly Township Library offered a free, daylong workshop for job-seekers, covering everything from online job searching to improving a resume to interviewing for a position. Additionally, patrons reported in the library's survey that they used library computers to work on resumes, hunt for jobs and take aptitude tests.

Four library staff members attended workshops sponsored by the Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative to learn to better assist unemployed workers. Library staff members received positive feedback for their efforts. "A patron had been coming in every day for over a year looking for job postings," Director Shirley Roos said. "He was employed at Wendy's and now has a job with an electronics firm. He couldn't thank us enough for all our help."

Howell Carnegie District Library

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation funding allowed the Howell Carnegie District Library to make substantial improvements in patron computing. Adding eight public-access computers brought the library to a total of 19 public workstations, all with faster and more reliable Internet connectivity.

Microsoft Office was installed on each machine, allowing patrons for the first time to e-mail resumes from the same workstation they used to write or update them. "Without the library's computers," one patron responded in the library's survey, "I don't know how I would have printed and put together my resume and [searched] for a job."

Ishpeming Carnegie Public Library

Upgrading to a 256K Internet line from a 56K line dramatically eased patron frustration at the Ishpeming Carnegie Public Library. "Several of our customers live in outlying areas with no access to cable, or the cost of other options is prohibitive," Director Janet LeFeber said. "Several customers have filed for unemployment online and like the ease and convenience of using their local library."

LeFeber helps at least one patron a week with resume preparation, but there are many others who work independently on the library's seven public-access computers. "One customer returned [recently] to tell us that he is now successfully employed by the Ishpeming Post Office," LeFeber said. "This particular individual used the library's word-processing capabilities on a regular basis to update and print his resume."

Lapeer District Library

In addition to a career resources Web page, up-to-date print materials and a variety of fliers and brochures with job advice, the Lapeer District Library offers one-on-one resume assistance for job-seekers.

Staff members at the library's Marguerite de Angeli branch meet individually with patrons to discuss the components of a resume and to help them identify employment and training information to include. For patrons working independently, signage and tutorials provide instruction for creating resumes.

Library staff members observed patrons returning to the library to revise or update their resumes. "After using our resources, they refine their job searches and define or re-define career goals," one staff member noted.

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant helped fund two T1 lines for the library. This eased patron job searches and kept library users coming back to check the latest postings. "I am very thankful for the availability of the library computers," one patron responded in the library's survey. "I have used them extensively and almost exclusively in my career efforts."

Manchester District Library

Residents of the small town and rural area served by the Manchester District Library found it easier to search for jobs, fill out online forms and e-mail documents to prospective employers after the library upgraded its Internet connection using the Reed Act/Gates Foundation funding.

“Our computers are now in use more often than not,” Library Director Heather Sturm said. “Several patrons have mentioned that they rely on the [Internet] access here because they do not or cannot have access at home. Others tell us that they appreciate the high-speed connection since it makes sites available to them that they otherwise wouldn’t be able to use.”

Additionally, the library created a job-seekers resource page on the Web, with information about career and resume books, word processing, local periodicals with job listings and online testing. “At least one patron mentioned to staff that the page guided them to resources they didn’t realize we had,” Sturm said. “And a few patrons even returned after finding jobs to thank staff for their help.”

Menominee County Library

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant enabled the Menominee County Library to maintain its 256K Internet connection. Otherwise, the library would have been forced to decrease its connection to 128K. The library staff went beyond this service to promote employment and training resources by asking patrons if they needed help finding a job or filing unemployment claims.

Fliers on job-related Web sites, resume and cover letter tips and common interview questions gave patrons a boost. “Now I have a better idea what questions the interviewers might ask me and I’ll be better prepared,” one patron wrote in the library’s survey.

Two staff members attended workshops on online career and job resources and job application skills presented by the Superiorland Library Cooperative. They shared what they learned with the rest of the staff.

“Staff provided one-on-one assistance to train customers on basic computer concepts, from using a mouse to using Microsoft Word to create a resume and basic Internet searching,” Director Patricia Cheski said. “We critiqued resumes and offered suggestions to help customers improve their resumes and cover letters.”

This instruction helped patrons on a fundamental level. “I was afraid to touch a computer before I came to the library,” one patron responded in the library’s survey. “Now I know how to use a mouse, type a resume and e-mail my grandkids.”

Munising School Public Library

The Munising School Public Library combined its Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant with financial support from its Friends of the Library group to provide patrons with the best

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service possible. The result: The library went from a 56K Internet connection to a 256K line, and it upgraded three public-access computers to accommodate the increased bandwidth.

What's more, library staff attended the Superiorland Library Cooperative's workshops on online career and job resources and job application skills, and staff members went on to share what they learned with high school teachers and guidance counselors preparing students for the work force. Additionally, the library partnered with the local Michigan Works office to promote its services.

More patrons have used the library to conduct online job searches. "The patrons have been able to do job searches, write resumes and file for unemployment," Director Charlotte Dugas said. "We had two patrons successfully find relocation jobs using the online resources, from searching to writing and submitting a resume. Another patron was able to file for unemployment online and commented on how nice it was, 'not having to drive an hour to the closest office.'"

Staff members educated patrons about job-related Internet resources such as mijob.info and the LearnATest database, Dugas said. The use of LearnATest increased substantially: The database had three hits from July 2003 to October 2003, but it received 53 hits from January 2004 to June 2004. Patrons used the database to practice for the GED test and the Civil Service exam, as well as to test their Spanish and math skills. High school students preparing for the SAT and ACT also used the database.

Negaunee Public Library

Increasing the Internet connection at the Negaunee Public Library from a 56K line to a 256K line provided patrons with improved access to job resources and greatly reduced their frustration.

"In our small community, a number of patrons do not have computer access at home and therefore needed instruction from the library staff in how to search and where to find the specific, usually unemployment, information they were seeking," Director Kathy Thurner said. "The faster bandwidth speed enabled the staff to quickly give a lesson in searching, and the patron felt successful that they were able to locate the information and forms they needed in a timely manner."

Thanks to library resources, one patron encountered an excellent dilemma: "I spent a lot of time here," the user wrote in the library's survey. "But I've got five job offers; now I have to decide where I want to go."

Otsego County Library

The Otsego County Library developed and conducted a series of workshops, "Computer Classes for Job-Seekers," using skills staff members gained at classes held by the Northland Library Cooperative. The Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant also made it possible for the Otsego County Library to maintain its T1 line after its shared payment agreement ended.

The library had 35 job-seekers register for the first round of classes. Participants were asked to indicate their progress based on learning objectives.

- 64 percent of participants in the resume-writing workshop indicated after the class they could perform all of the items listed as learning objectives, and another 22 percent could do most of them.
 - 93 percent of participants said they felt more comfortable writing resumes and cover letters.
- 77 percent of participants in the online job resources workshop indicated after the workshop they could do all the tasks listed in the objectives, while 33 percent said they could do most of the tasks.

“Our staff felt we needed to do more than provide access to computers and online resources, that this target group needed individualized instruction on both computer use and job-searching skills,” Director Maureen Derenzy said. The library has gone on to offer additional basic computer training.

Presque Isle District Library

Many of Presque Isle District Library’s patrons are unemployed or employed only part time or seasonally, and these users depend on the library to find work and to learn how to file unemployment claims. Improved Internet connectivity at the library’s branches has allowed patrons to use sites that were previously difficult to access because they would time out or would not load properly.

Library staff members provide computer training to patrons, helping them with basic skills, software such as Microsoft Word and Internet access. “Speedy access to the World Wide Web and the Internet has allowed our patrons to take care of the business of filing unemployment claims and/or looking for work,” Director Janis Stevenson said. “Many open free e-mail accounts so that they can communicate on a regular basis with potential employers, find job opportunities, send resumes, respond to job listings, etc. Our software programs, i.e., Microsoft Word, have helped many patrons to put together professional-looking resumes.”

Patrons receive one-on-one help with computer basics, job searching, creating a resume or filing for unemployment. The library also holds computer and Internet classes to help patrons get started. “I’m not computer literate,” one patron responded in the library’s survey, “but at least I feel more comfortable now looking for jobs on the Internet.”

Wayne County Library—River Rouge Branch

Patrons at the Wayne County Library—River Rouge Branch received plenty of one-on-one assistance with employment resources.

Employment sites listed on the Michigan eLibrary were especially useful for job-seekers. “Frequently patrons would already know what companies they were looking for, but needed assistance in searching for their home page,” Director Maria McCarville said. “All of the people observed applying for jobs online needed librarian assistance the first

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time. Whenever possible we would sit with them and walk them through the process.” In all, the library’s staff helped 42 people submit job applications online.

Additionally, the library held informal resume and cover letter workshops, helping more than 135 people create resumes. Most participants had never used a computer, so the library staff also taught word processing. “This community prefers less structured instruction, so we would also provide one-on-one instruction as needed,” McCarville said. “The one-on-one assistance seemed to be the most beneficial to the patrons.”

Wayne Public Library

The Reed Act/Gates Foundation grant enabled the Wayne Public Library to afford the continuing costs of higher bandwidth Internet service, which was a boon to the community and those who come from neighboring cities to use the library’s Internet services.

“In a predominantly blue-collar area with high unemployment and underemployment, most of our clients either do not have a computer in their home or if they do, the computers are older, slower and use dial-up access,” Director Lois VanStipdonk said. “To these people the speed of the library computers is paramount.”

Patrons use the computers for job searching and other tasks to further themselves. “I use the resources to register for continuing education courses at the local community college,” one patron responded in the library’s survey. Another patron prepared for a job application, responding in the survey: “Thanks to the library I learned enough to be able to fill out [a] 45-minute application at Wal-Mart.”

Library staff members provided assistance with Internet use and resume writing. “The library is located close to a Michigan Works facility and the staff discovered that many of the patrons utilizing the Internet and word processing were familiar with searching techniques and potential sites,” VanStipdonk said. “Assistance was offered as needed to augment their skills, but for the most part, the clients were able to work independently.”

White Pine Library

Staff members at the White Pine Library in Montcalm County educated themselves to better help job-seekers by providing direction and answering questions. An in-house training session highlighted online employment resources and the resume component of Microsoft Word. Additionally, staff learned to use the services of the Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency and the LearnATest database. Once staff members accomplished this, they offered improved service to patrons.

“Our main activity to assist job-seekers and the unemployed was to construct and distribute a guide listing reputable online sources, their features and how to use them,” Director Katie Arwood said. This guide served as a user-friendly resource that provided patrons with a starting point in their search for employment or as they sought to file for unemployment.

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The library added a T1 line, improving Internet experiences for patrons and staff members. “The increased speed and consistency of our connection have improved our ability to help our patrons and helped our patrons better utilize their time in the library,” Arwood said.